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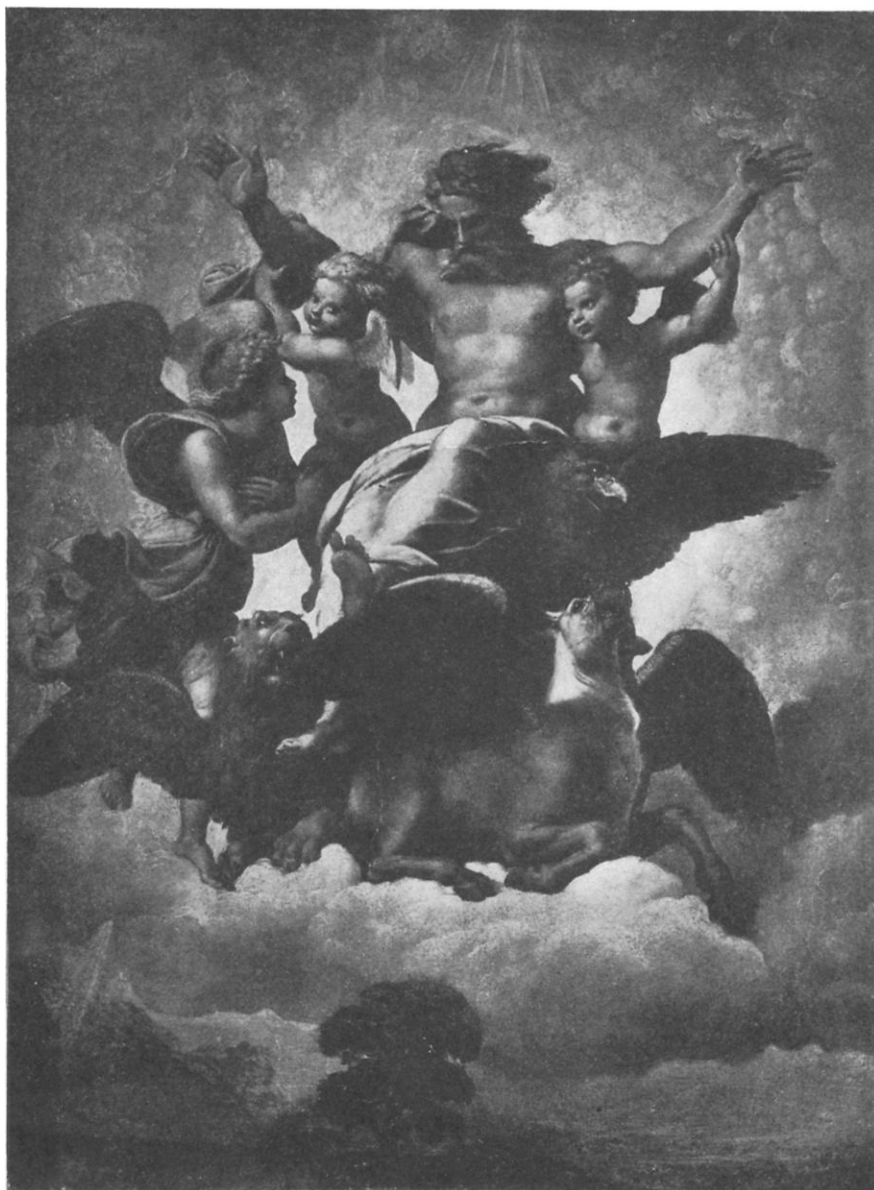
A NEW TYPE OF CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTIANITY IN THE MAKING

There is a widespread feeling that we are witnessing the rise of a type of Christianity different in some respects from any that has preceded it, and this feeling undoubtedly has its basis in fact. Not even Christianity with its canonized literature and its creeds intended to be perpetual can altogether escape the influence of the evolutionary process that characterizes every phase of human life. The process is always going on; and when we speak of a new type as existing today, we mean neither that it is wholly new, nor that it will displace the older types, nor that it is itself rigid and fixed, nor that it will give rise to a new church or denomination. What we do mean is that the process of change has been more than usually rapid of late, and that there are in consequence signs of the emergence of a type of Christianity, partly old, partly new, with some elements already defined, others yet to be determined, yet on the whole distinct enough to be recognized as taking its place as a new type alongside of others that have been longer established and are more familiar. If this be true, the fact is worth observing and, as far as this is possible, defining.

THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT IN RELIGION

One characteristic of the new Christianity that is already clearly defined is its thoroughgoing acceptance of the maxim, "Whatsoever is true." This principle is of course not new. It was enunciated long ago by the apostle Paul, and has ruled the thinking of many both before and after him. But the type of Christianity of which we are speaking bids fair to yield a more unqualified allegiance to it



Raphael

THE VISION OF EZEKIEL

than it has ever received since the day when Jesus made it the ruling principle, intellectually speaking, of his religion. This allegiance finds expression in the acceptance of the results of scientific study of the world. If there be a controversy between Genesis and Geology, the new Christianity will stand with Geology. The record left in the strata of the earth cannot be impugned by a poet of the prescientific age, even though that poet be also a prophet of a higher conception of God than had before his day prevailed. In conformity to the same principle the new Christianity will accept the assured results of historical investigation into the records of ancient times. Religion has its rights, but so also has history, and one of these is that it be studied by historical methods. The Chronicler's religion may have been far better than that of the stone-cutter who left his record in the monuments, or the builder of cities whose ruins uncovered today tell the story of days long gone by. Yet the record in stone and clay may furnish the sure basis for the correction of the Chronicler's chronology. So also will it be in that special department of historical study that is known as literary criticism. How the books of the Bible came into their present form; how we got the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Gospels, the Apocalypse, are all questions respecting which we may have not unnatural prejudices and preferences. But in the long run the evidence patiently sifted, by a process that may require two or three generations to complete it, must determine our decision, rather than any prejudice or preference whatever.

But decision of such questions as these on the basis of the principle "Whatsoever is true" will affect our decision of other questions also. For, in the first place, the decision of a historical question will often directly affect our judgment in a matter of doctrine. Thus the discovery of historical errors in the books of the Old Testament has compelled the revision of the dogma of the inerrancy of Scripture, and the recognition of the source of the apocalyptic theories of the New Testament has led to a re-examination of the whole matter of the validity of these theories. And in the second place, the thoroughgoing applications of the principle in historical matters will inevitably give rise to the demand for an equally uncompromising application of it in matters of even greater importance. The result of this twofold influence of the apostle's great maxim—or, if

you please, of the incursion of the scientific spirit into the field of theological study—is already seen, and will increasingly appear, in the releasing of men's minds from the bonds of tradition and creed. The men of the past were quite within their rights when they sought to formulate their own convictions and faith; we ourselves are constantly doing the same thing in a more or less formal way. They were only wrong in forgetting that the same right would belong to their successors, and we are wrong when in slothfulness or timidity we shirk our tasks and hide ourselves from our perhaps painful duty behind the shelter of their achievement.

THE INSISTENCE UPON CHARACTER

A second already determined characteristic of the Christianity that is now taking shape lies in the fact that it lays less stress on theology than has been usual in the past, and less than it itself lays on conduct and character. It recognizes the possibility that an honest man may be in great perplexity on many questions of doctrine, and yet be sincerely and wholly devoted to the practice of the principles that Jesus taught and exemplified. It does not forget that "he that wills to do his will shall know of the doctrine"; but it remembers also that there is no clause of time or degree attached to this promise and is willing to wait for its fulfilment in its own time and measure. Hence it is disposed to welcome to its fellowship not only all classes and conditions of men in respect to wealth, education, and culture, but also men of widely different types of theological belief or doubt; but not men of widely different moral purpose. It will not indeed be without theology, nor will that theology be a series of negations. It will be positive, but it will be simple and brief; and its emphasis will be on those things assent to which is a test of character rather than a measure of theological subtlety; on sympathy with the aims of Jesus and readiness to walk in the footsteps of his self-sacrifice, rather than on theories of his person or precise predictions respecting the future.

THE DEMAND FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE

A third characteristic of the new type of Christianity will be—already is—its emphasis on practical achievement. Not indeed that the church as such will undertake all the great tasks that demand

doing. It will rather be the duty of the church to produce men and women who will do these things through such agencies as may be found most convenient and effective. But the character of Christianity will be manifest in the type of men that it produces, and in the work that they do in the church and outside of it. It will be in the true sense philanthropic, and in the broadest sense missionary, seeking to make its own Christianity ever more perfectly Christian in spirit and deed, and to extend that religion through the length and breadth of the lands of the earth. Unmoved by fear or hope of the speedy end of the world, undismayed by any doctrine of the inherent depravity of men or the inherent badness of all non-Christian religions, recognizing in all nations one race of men, it will labor with zeal and with discretion for the promotion of the highest welfare of all and the harmonious relation of all nations.

THE RELIGION OF THE SPIRIT

These characteristics we believe may be clearly discerned in the type of Christianity which is now taking form in this country and Europe. But there is one question respecting it that is as yet unanswered. It will be scientific, ethical, practical, and altruistic; will it be religious? Will it perceive that the morality that is to be effective in personal character and the elevation of the community must be deeply rooted in religion? Will it acknowledge that to love one's fellow-men in truth and steadfastness one must live in loving and believing fellowship with God? It is indeed easy to overlook these things. Morality may sever itself from the religion that produced it, and seem for long to suffer nothing in consequence. But the history of religion does not permit us to believe that either religion or morality can continue to flourish alone. Each needs the other for its own best development. The religion of Jesus is profoundly ethical, demanding right motives and right conduct. "He that heareth these words of mine and *doeth* them not is like unto a man that built his house upon the sand." But it is just as deeply religious. The injunction to enter into the closet and pray to the Father who is in secret is as central and as fundamental as the command to love one's neighbor as one's self.

The scientific spirit—absolute loyalty to the teachings of evidence—

is a necessary element of the highest type of religion and morality. This spirit is, as we have already said, central in the teaching of Jesus. No tradition, no scripture even, is authoritative for him against the conclusions demanded by his own insight into the world of present fact. But equally necessary to the highest type of religion is the recognition of the reality of the spiritual and of the possibility of fellowship between man and God. Science and mysticism do not easily blend. The man of science tends to reject the mysterious as unreal; the mystic to thrust aside the scientific as irreligious. But Jesus found a way to blend them, and blend they must if religion is to reach its best development. The new type of Christianity will be scientific; it will be ethical; it will be social and altruistic; will it be religious? It will not be the religion of authority; will it be the religion of the Spirit?